



THE PASTOR'S DESK

March 14, 2010 - The Eucharist and the Priest

Dear Parishioners,

In the encyclical *Ecclesia de Eucharistia*, Pope John Paul II considered the connection between the Eucharist and the Priesthood. During this "Year of the Priest" let us take a moment to see what the Holy Father had to say: "*If the Eucharist is the centre and summit of the Church's life, it is likewise the centre and summit of priestly ministry. For this reason, with a heart filled with gratitude to our Lord Jesus Christ, I repeat that the Eucharist "is the principal and central raison d'être of the sacrament of priesthood, which effectively came into being at the moment of the institution of the Eucharist"*.

Priests are engaged in a wide variety of pastoral activities. If we also consider the social and cultural conditions of the modern world it is easy to understand how priests face the very real *risk of losing their focus* amid such a great number of different tasks. The Second Vatican Council saw in pastoral charity the bond which gives unity to the priest's life and work. This, the Council adds, "flows mainly from the Eucharistic Sacrifice, which is therefore the centre and root of the whole priestly life". We can understand, then, how important it is for the spiritual life of the priest, as well as for the good of the Church and the world, that priests follow the Council's recommendation to celebrate the Eucharist daily: "for even if the faithful are unable to be present, it is an act of Christ and the Church". In this way priests will be able to counteract the daily tensions which lead to a lack of focus and they will find in the Eucharistic Sacrifice – the true centre of their lives and ministry – the spiritual strength needed to deal with their different pastoral responsibilities. Their daily activity will thus become truly Eucharistic.

The centrality of the Eucharist in the life and ministry of priests is the basis of its centrality in the *pastoral promotion of priestly vocations*. It is in the Eucharist that prayer for vocations is most closely united to the prayer of Christ the Eternal High Priest. At the same time the diligence of priests in carrying out their Eucharistic ministry, together with the conscious, active and fruitful participation of the faithful in the Eucharist, provides young men with a powerful example and incentive for responding generously to God's call. Often it is the example of a priest's fervent pastoral charity which the Lord uses to sow and to bring to fruition in a young man's heart the seed of a priestly calling.

All of this shows how distressing and irregular is the situation of a Christian community which, despite having sufficient numbers and variety of faithful to form a parish, does not have a priest to lead it. Parishes are communities of the baptized who express and affirm their identity above all through the celebration of the Eucharistic Sacrifice. But this requires the presence of a presbyter, who alone is qualified to offer the Eucharist *in persona Christi*. When a community lacks a priest, attempts are rightly made somehow to remedy the situation so that it can continue its Sunday celebrations, and those religious and laity who lead their brothers and sisters in prayer exercise in a praiseworthy way the common priesthood of all the faithful based on the grace of Baptism. But such solutions must be considered merely temporary, while the community awaits a priest.

The sacramental incompleteness of these celebrations should above all inspire the whole community to pray with greater fervor that the Lord will send laborers into his harvest (cf. *Mt 9:38*). It should also be an incentive to mobilize all the resources needed for an adequate pastoral promotion of vocations, without yielding to the temptation to seek solutions which lower the moral and formative standards demanded of candidates for the priesthood.

Pope John Paul II was wise in recalling priests to the importance of daily Mass. One thing that I've found as a pastor is that you cannot predict what each day may bring. You can schedule appointments, meetings, etc. but you never know what crisis, difficulty or other important situation may arise that demands your attention. The only thing a priest can count on day-in, day-out, is offering Mass. A priest realizes soon into his ministry, that the Eucharist is the center of his life. All the ministry he does comes from and returns to this great mystery. All of us, too, have the Eucharist as the center of our lives. Many times what we considers "distractions" are actually the people and situations we need to bring to Christ in this great Sacrament. If you find yourself thinking about your difficulties, or the difficulties of those you love, while at Mass, don't try to dismiss them as distractions. They are, perhaps, the people and situations the Our Lord wants you to bring to Him in your Holy Communion.

You can also bring the Church's need for vocations to your Holy Communion. Next weekend, we will be doing a vocations initiative. We will ask you to submit names of young men whom you think may have a vocation to the priesthood. We will then invite them to come to the various vocations programs of the Archdiocese of Washington. Take time this week to think about the name of some young man in High School, College, or who is a single, young adult whose name you might submit. Bring that man to Jesus in the Blessed Sacrament.

**God bless,
Fr. LaHood**

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**Called by Name
March 20 and 21**

Do you know someone who would have the qualities to become a priest? Think you know someone? Our parish will be offering a special program to promote vocations to the priesthood. It's a chance to recognize, call forth, and encourage young men (age 16 to 40-something) of our parish to consider whether God is calling them to the priesthood. You will have the opportunity to recommend him by filling out a card and placing it in the collection basket. A similar event for young women is being planned for the future, so hold onto those names for now. Please pray for vocations and consider the young men you know – Our Lord may be asking *you* to help someone recognize God's call in his life!